

North Fork of Pound Lake 2003

North Fork of Pound Lake is a 154-acre reservoir located in Wise County. The lake was formed in 1966. North Fork has a shoreline length of 13.5 miles, a maximum depth of 55 feet and an average depth of 19 feet. The area surrounding the lake is almost completely forested. Some mature oak and hemlock stands are visible, and poplar trees now stand where mountain families once raised corn on steep hillsides. The U.S. Forest Service now owns most of the land surrounding the lake. The dam is owned and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The lake supports a diverse assemblage of fish species. Largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass are available. Bluegill sunfish, black and white crappie, rock bass, walleye, musky, channel catfish, flathead catfish, bullheads and carp are also present. The primary forage fishes are alewives and gizzard shad, which were stocked in the late 1990's. The Department stocked alewives in 1997, and the gizzard shad originated from an anonymous source.

Bass populations have improved considerably in the past few years. Total catch rates for all bass exceeds 100 fish per hour of sampling, which is well above average for Southwest Virginia reservoirs. Largemouth and spotted bass are abundant. Smallmouth are not as common, but do provide angling diversity. The size structure of the largemouth population is improving steadily. The percentage of adult bass that exceed 15 inches has increased three fold since 1997. This could be the result of the 14 to 18-inch protective slot length limit for bass that was adopted in 1999. The availability of alewives and gizzard shad for forage could also be a factor.

Bluegill abundance and size structure has declined somewhat in recent years. This could be the result of increased competition for food between bluegills and alewives. There is still some good bluegill fishing to be had though.

Crappie populations have also improved in recent years. Both black and white crappie are doing well in the lake. Typically from 25 to 50 percent of the adult crappie sampled exceed 10 inches. Again, the improvement may be related to the more restrictive size limit (10-inch minimum) established in 1999, or the improved forage opportunities following the introduction of shad. The number of crappie collected per hour of sampling increased sharply in 2002. One factor that could have influenced the number of crappie collected in sampling is the addition of several hinge-tree fish attractors. These attractors may have concentrated the crappie in shallow water where they are easier to capture. If that is the case, the attractors should also make the crappie more accessible to anglers.

Walleyes were first stocked into North Fork in 1998. About 7,700 fingerling walleyes are stocked each year. The walleye population is growing, as evidenced by the steadily increased catch rates during sampling. About 15 percent of the walleyes collected are

greater than 20 inches. Fishing should improve as more year classes recruit into the fishable size range.

Channel catfish, flathead catfish and bullheads are available for anglers. Routine sampling does not target catfish in particular, so most of our information comes from incidental catches. A flathead catfish exceeding 40 inches was collected in 2001. Channel catfish are also collected on occasion. Channel catfish are now being stocked annually, so fishing may improve in the future.

Overall the fishing has been good at North Fork in recent years. An angler survey is underway, and should provide valuable information about the angler preferences, catch and harvest rates and economics of the fishery. This will provide biologists with the opportunity to compare what we are finding in our routine sampling to what anglers are finding on their fishing trips.

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